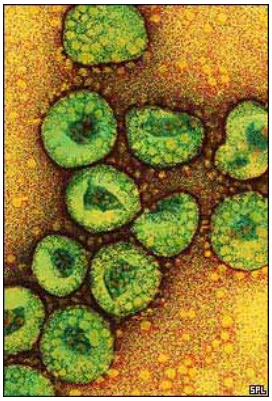
Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Fact Sheet

What is severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)?



Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness that has recently become known. This new virus is believed to be related to the common cold virus, the coronavirus. SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that during the SARS outbreak of 2003, a total of 8,098 people worldwide became sick with SARS; of these 774 died. In the United States, there were 192 cases of SARS, none of which were fatal.

In July of 2003, cases were no longer being reported and SARS outbreaks worldwide were considered contained. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is currently working with domestic and international partners to prepare for the possible re-emergence of SARS.

How do people get SARS?

The CDC states that the most common way SARS is spread is by having close contact between people or handling infectious materials from a person who has SARS. SARS is thought to be spread by respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can also spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eye(s). It is also possible that SARS can be spread through the air or by other ways that are currently not known. Health care workers are at high risk for contracting SARS and should carefully follow personal protection precautions at all times.

What is close contact?

Close contact generally means people who live in the same house or someone providing care for a person who has SARS, such as a health care provider. Examples of close contract include caring for the personal hygiene needs of an infected person, kissing or hugging, sharing eating or drinking utensils, talking to someone within 3 feet, and touching someone directly. Close contact does not include activities such as walking by a person or sitting across a waiting room or office for a brief period of time.

How can SARS be prevented?

The best way to help prevent SARS and other diseases is frequent hand washing with soap and water, or the use of alcohol-based hand rubs. For more information about hand washing, visit the CDC website (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/op/handwashing.htm).

When sneezing or coughing, use tissue to cover your nose and mouth, and encourage others to do so as well. The CDC does not recommend the use of surgical masks out in the general public to prevent SARS.

Who is at-risk for getting SARS?

Most of the SARS cases in the United States have occurred among travelers returning to the U.S. from other parts of the world where SARS is present. There have been very few cases where people have had close contact with a family member or health care worker who has SARS.

Is it safe to travel?

The CDC has issued two types of notices to travelers: advisories and alerts. A ***travel advisory*** recommends that unnecessary travel be delayed; a ***travel alert*** does not advise against travel, but informs travelers of a health concern and provides advice about protection. CDC updates information on its website on the travel status of areas with SARS (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel.htm) as the situation evolves.

Why are isolation and quarantine important for preventing the spread of SARS?

To prevent the spread of a contagious illness, public health officials rely on many techniques such as *isolation* and *quarantine*. *Isolation* applies to people who are known to have an illness. *Quarantine* applies to people have been exposed to an illness but who may or may not become infected. People may voluntarily isolate or quarantine themselves or may be required to do so by public health officials. Both are common practices in public health and aim to control exposure to infected or potentially infected people. To date, the CDC has recommended isolation of individuals with SARS, but has not required quarantine or isolation. For more information visit the CDC website, SARS and Quarantine (www.cdc.gov/sars/quarantine.htm).

What are the symptoms of SARS?

The illness usually begins with a high fever (measured temperature greater than 100.4^0 [> 38.0^0 C]). People sometimes have chills, including headache, and a general feeling of discomfort and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms at the beginning such as a runny nose.

After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough that may include or progress to a point where not enough oxygen is getting to the blood. In 10 to 20 percent of cases, patients will require mechanical ventilation (machines that assist people in breathing).

What Should You Do If Think You , or Someone in Your Family, May Have SARS?

The CDC recommends that you consult with your health care provider as soon as possible. **It is important that you call ahead and alert them before you visit so they can take precautions to keep from exposing other people to SARS.**

What Should You Do If You are Caring for Someone Who May Have SARS?

The CDC has issued guidelines for people why may have SARS and for care providers at home. To view these guidelines visit: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/factsheetcc.htm.

What is the treatment for SARS?

People who have SARS should receive the same treatment that would be used for any patient with serious pneumonia. The CDC and other scientists continue to investigate SARS in hopes of discovering more about the disease and possible treatments.

Is SARS in Placer County?

No. There were two suspect cases in Placer County in the spring of 2003. Confirmation testing conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that these two cases were <u>not</u> probable SARS cases.

What is Placer County doing about SARS?

Public Health Laboratory System

The Placer County Public Health Laboratory provides analyses to protect the public's health by testing for many infectious diseases. For possible SARS cases the Public Health laboratory provides consultation and assistance to physicians on specimen collection and submission of specimens for possible testing. Physicians should contact Mark Miller, Director of Communicable Disease Control and Laboratory Services, for specific information at (530) 889-7210.

Partnering with Medical Providers

Placer County Health and Human Services - Community Health gives medical providers updated information about communicable diseases and other important health topics through a variety of methods such as, *Spread the Word,* through the Placer County Health Alert Network, and on the county website (http://www.placer.ca.gov/hhs/). Community Health also provides training for physicians and health care providers and on reporting communicable diseases.

Public Education and Information Services

The Public Information Office, located in the Placer County Executive Office, provides current information to the general public about communicable diseases through a variety of sources, including the Placer County website, local newspapers, on radio and television, and at public meetings.

Where can I find more information?

The websites for the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization provide comprehensive information about SARS.

Centers for Disease Control SARS web page (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/). Updated regularly.

World Health Organization SARS web page: (www.who.int/csr/sars/en/). Updated regularly.

State of California, Department of Health and Human Services SARS web page (www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/disb/sars.htm)